

MICHIGAN LEADERS FOR EDUCATION EXCELLENCE
POSITION PROPOSAL
RELATING TO
INCREASING THE LEGAL DROPOUT AGE
TO EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD
WORKING GROUP
MARCH 21, 2007
APPROVED

The Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence are opposed to increasing the legal dropout age to eighteen years old. While the proposal may be based on good intentions, it is a premature action that will have little impact and does not address the issues which cause the problem in the first place.

BACKGROUND

In her recent State of the State Address, Governor identified the dropout age as unfinished business that needs attention. Many state lawmakers and policy analysis have expressed doubts that simply changing the age will be of much value and the proposal has languished.

The MBLEE Legislative and Policy Committee reviewed the proposal and background information from a number of states that are also considering making this change. Currently 13 states require students to remain in school until age 18 or successful completion of graduation requirements. The MBLEE Committee has concluded that increasing the legal dropout age to 18, as recommended, is not a solution to the state's dropout problems. Under the current law it is estimated that approximately 20,000 students below the age of 16 leave the system and are classified as dropouts. There is little or no enforcement of the statute and school systems have almost completely eliminated the concept of using truant officers.

The MBLEE Committee recommends that before the State of Michigan acts to increase the legal dropout age to 18 it should:

- Institute initiatives such as “graduation coaches” that work with students identified as being “at-risk” of dropping out. Each student should have an adult advocate and schools should establish early intervention systems.
- Create a more extensive system of optional vocational and technical training for 16-year-olds that is relevant.
- Modify the current system of community colleges to accept students who feel they no longer fit in high schools.
- Consider establishing the “middle college” for students that may be at risk.
- Hold schools accountable for establishing student retention programs and use an average daily attendance count for reimbursement purposes. An average daily attendance count will encourage schools to focus on getting students to school every day not just on the state designated count day.

- Develop a system of enforcement and penalties for students that dropout early.
- Implement the accelerated learning program and fully integrate the 21st Century Skills Applied Learning Core.
- Require would-be dropouts to enroll in GED certificate programs.

The Michigan Business Leaders for Education Excellence recognize that there are many reasons why students choose to dropout of school and believe that those reasons should be addressed or the current requirement enforced before any change is made to the law.